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ABSTRACT

Several researchers have shown that whites benefit from the presence of large numbers of blacks. This study attempts to determine the effect that the proportion of blacks in an area has upon both black and white poverty rates. Using standard correlation techniques, the basic relationships are examined for 92 Southern SMSA's (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas). The data used were taken from the 1970 U. S. Census Reports. Findings indicate that there is a negative relationship between the proportion of the black population and the number of whites that are in poverty. However, this is the case for blacks. It was found that the ratio of blacks to whites in poverty is linearly related to the percentage of the general population that is black. A general program that would help reduce the size of the poor population and benefit the general population is outlined. (Author/RJ)

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BLACKS AND SOUTHERN POVERTY

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Presented to the Southwestern Sociological Association, Dallas, Texas, March 1973.

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ABSTRACT

Several researchers have shown that Whites benefit from the presence of large numbers of Blacks. In this study an attempt is made to determine the effect that the proportion of Blacks in an area has upon both Black and White poverty rates. Using standard correlation techniques, the basic relationships are examined for 92 southern Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas. The data used were gathered from the 1970 U. S. Census Reports. Findings indicate that there is a negative relationship between the proportion of the Black population and the number of Whites that are in poverty. However, this is not the case for Blacks. It was found also that the ratio of Blacks to Whites in poverty is linearly related to the percent of the general population that is Black. The writers suggest a general program that would help to reduce the size of the poor population and benefit the general population.

It frequently has been noted that Whites often benefit from the presence of Blacks both economically and psychologically (Simpson and Yinger, 1965). It also has been observed that Blacks experience additional economic discrimination as their relative size increases in a given population (cf., Blalock, 1956 and Glenn, 1963, 1964). It is within this context that we propose this study. In contrast to most poverty studies, which rather clearly focus on either psychological or structural aspects of the poor, we concern ourselves with ecological characteristics. Specifically, we are interested in the ecological relationships between the relative size of Black versus White populations and their respective poverty rates in the urban south. However, as with any study using ecological attributes, any conclusions drawn from the analysis must be cautiously interpreted. We have attempted to avoid making any "ecological fallacies" (cf., Robinson, 1950). The reader should be equally careful in attempting to generalize these findings.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

We may assume from a variety of economic indicators that Blacks in the United States (and particularly in the southern region of the U. S.) are economically discriminated against

(cf., Blalock, 1957; Williams and Acock, 1973). Also, it is fair to assume that at any given time the number of jobs in any given area is relatively constant (Glenn, 1963 and 1964). With these two assumptions we are able to develop the model specifying our theoretical orientation.

We would argue that the amount of competition among Blacks and between Blacks and Whites might tend to increase as the relative proportion of Blacks in a given area increases. If Blacks and Whites are in competition for the same jobs, then as the number of Blacks increase there should be an increased number of Blacks who fall into the poverty categories. Also, the increase should have no effect on the number of Whites in poverty unless there is some thing which tends to either reduce or eliminate job competition, e.g., job hiring discrimination. Any degree of economic discrimination against the hiring of Blacks would tend to benefit Whites more as the relative proportion of Blacks in the area increased. The reason for this is that intra-racial competition would tend to decrease and inter-racial competition would tend to increase. Thus, theoretically Whites would benefit economically even at the lowest socio-economic levels from the increased presence of a relatively large proportion of Blacks, given that there is a White bias in hiring (cf., Glenn, 1963; Williams and Acock, 1973). It also might be logical to assume that Whites would tend to help "their own" before they help Blacks. In fact, it is not illogical to

suspect that Whites might benefit economically at the expense of Blacks, e.g., taking jobs from Blacks and giving them to Whites.

Since the number of jobs potentially open to Blacks may be limited, particularly in the lowest economic class, we might expect the competition for these jobs to increase as the number of Blacks increase in an area. This increase in competition will theoretically result in a larger proportion of persons being left without work, which in turn would increase the number of Blacks on the poverty rolls. That is, jobs previously held by the most socially deprived Blacks would be competed for by Blacks who were more highly skilled and educated. This new competition could well result in the most highly deprived person being left without anything to do except seek some kind of charity.

We also might expect that there is a negative relationship between Black and White poverty. That is, as the number of Blacks in a given area increases the low status Whites are put in a relatively better competitive position. The reason for this is that where discrimination in hiring is the case there would be relatively fewer Whites for the potential biased employer to select from and thus the White job seeker would have a relatively better chance of being employed. This, in addition to the previously mentioned idea that Whites might tend to help other Whites before they do Blacks suggests that there should be a negative relationship between Black and White poverty rates.

This relationship is expected to be rectilinear in form, i.e., as the proportion of Blacks increase the ratio of Black to White poverty should also increase at a relatively constant rate.[1]

In summary, we would expect a positive relationship between the proportion of Blacks in an area and the number of Blacks in poverty. The relationship between the proportion of Blacks in an area and White poverty is expected to be negative. The number of Blacks and Whites in poverty is expected to be inversely related according to the theoretical orientation we have attempted to develop. The theoretical relationships, as predicted by our theoretical orientation, are shown in Figure 1.

// Figure 1 about here //

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The data used in this study were gathered by the U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1970. From the General Characteristics volumes we determined the proportion of Black families, the number of Black families living in poverty and the number of White families in poverty. This information was determined for the ninety-two southern Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas. In 1970, a nonfarm family of four with an annual income of $3,968 or less was classified as poor. The proportion of Black families was determined simply by dividing the total number of Black families ~~into~~ by the total number of families in the SMSA.

Product moment correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationships between the proportion Black and the Black and White families in poverty. Extensive controls are not practical or even feasible since so many factors other than the proportion of Black families may potentially influence the poverty rates of the two groups. However, we have controlled for two variables that are considered to be potentially confounding. The first variable, total size of the populations of the SMSA, has been found in past research to be related to the economic status of the two groups (Glenn, 1963, 1964). The second control variable was that of the total number of families in poverty in the SMSA's. By controlling for this factor we are able to determine whether or not the relative poverty rates are due to general economic conditions in the SMSA's or to aspects of systematic discrimination.

In order to determine the general "form" of the relationship between the variables, the ratio of Black to White poverty was determined for seven different levels of Black population "density." Comparable information is provided for each of the southern states and the District of Columbia in order to make state comparisons possible.

FINDINGS

The general relationships suggested in the theoretical discussion appear to be supported by the data used in this study. The correlation in Figure 2 indicates that as the proportion of Blacks in the SMSA's increase so do the number of Blacks in poverty. There is a positive relationship between the absolute

number of Blacks in poverty and the percentage of Blacks in an SMSA (r=.404). There is also a positive relationship between the overall proportion Blacks and the proportion Black population in poverty (+.360). Further, the relationship increases substantially when we control for both the absolute size of the SMSA's population and the number of families in poverty. Our error reduction, in predicting number of families in poverty from proportion of Black population increases from about 16 percent to 40 percent when we control for either of the two variables.

// Figure 2 about here //

The correlation between the proportion of Blacks and White poverty was also in the predicted direction although it was at a substantially lower level. It is evident that proportion Black explains very little of the variation in White poverty when we examine the zero order correlations. Although there is a moderate increase in the explained variance when population size is controlled, we note that our prediction error is reduced (to a point equivalent to that for predicting Black poverty from proportion Black) when the number of families in poverty is controlled. Again, it should be noted that the relationship is negative, which suggests that Whites at the lowest socio-economic levels appear to benefit economically from the presence of large numbers of Blacks.

Black poverty and White poverty are positively related as may be seen in Figure 1. The interesting and most theoretically consistent element of this relationship is that it changes

direction when we control for either the size of the SMSA population or for the number of families in poverty. That is, the relationship changes from r=+.580 to r=-.247 when we control for the size of the SMSA's. Even more radically different from the zero order correlation is the partial correlation when controlling for the number of poverty families in the SMSA's (r=-.943). This relationship, with the relative amount of poverty controlled, allows us to reduce our error in predicting Black poverty from White poverty (and vice-versa) by over 88 percent.

Table 1 indicates clearly that as the proportion of Blacks in an area increases, there is a systematic increase in the ratio of Blacks to Whites in poverty. In terms of the relative proportion of Blacks in poverty to the percent of Blacks in the SMSA, we can see that Blacks are consistently over represented as compared to Whites. The lower the proportion of Blacks in an area, the closer is the Black to White poverty ratios. Conversely, the higher the percentage of Blacks in the SMSA's, the higher the ratio of Blacks to Whites in poverty. The data presented in this Table is consistent also with the theoretical orientation set forth earlier.

// Table 1 about here //

We have included Table 2 to allow the reader to make state-by-state comparisons. It may be noted that West Virginia has not only the lowest proportion of Blacks in its population but also the lowest ratio of Black to White poverty. The converse conclusion is true also if we ignore Delaware, which has only one

SMSA (making this state estimate unreliable). It is also noted that for nearly all of the southern states there are three Black families in poverty for every one White family in poverty. The data in this table are generally consistent with the theoretical orientation set forth earlier in this paper.

// Table 2 about here //

IMPLICATIONS

It is with a great deal of hesitation that we suggest any policy implications since it is obvious that several humanistic issues may become involved. However, since sociologists are often criticized for not suggesting the implications of their work, we will present our thoughts in this area.

From the preceeding analysis we have found evidence which supports the idea that low status Blacks tend to experience even greater deprivations as the concentration of Blacks increase. This may be due to a variety of factors, not the least of which is discrimination in hiring.

The final report of the Commission of Population growth and American Future (1972) may be understating the case, when it remarks:

> "Historically, the cities of the United States have provided both social and economic advancement to the deprived . . . By and large, however, this process has not worked well for the Blacks. Institutional racism has been more pervasive and persistent than earlier forms of ethnic discrimination, and serious inequities remain in education, housing and employment."

It is consistent with our theoretical argument to suggest that stringent governmental regulations concerning the prevention of bias in hiring and promotion will not by itself solve the problem for Blacks. This is not to suggest that such programs be eliminated or that affirmative action not be taken, but it is simply to indicate that these programs are essentially treatments for the symptoms of the problem and not treatment for the problem itself. To treat the problem necessitates manipulation of the interrelationship between population density and employment opportunities.

Legal attempts to insure equal employment opportunity within any geographic area, with a limited job base, is a short term solution and tends to obscure the problem. Further, it is consistent to expect that greater employment opportunities vary inversely with the need for enforced fair employment practices. That is, the less the inter-racial competition (with more jobs available) the less the discrimination along racial lines--thus, the less need for laws insuring fair employment practices.

There are simply not enough jobs for the population. Regardless of the reasons, it seems clear that Blacks on the lower level of the socio-economic status scale do not benefit from a high density of Black population. Since we have been using an ecological approach in this paper, let us continue by offering an ecological solution to the problem of job shortage.

Often the problem of job shortage may be that the people are simply not where the jobs exist. If this is the case, it is obvious that a large number of our poverty problems might be

solved by simply letting people know where the jobs are and encouraging them to move to those locations. This might be accomplished by establishing a central job data bank where an employer, anywhere in the country, who needs "X" number of unskilled or semiskilled workers could feed this information. This information could then be used by job counselors to encourage people to move where the jobs existed. Added incentives could be provided by the potential employers by subsidizing the move of the low status person or family as well as underwrite any necessary job training or retraining that might be necessary.

The U. S. government could encourage this type of program by giving participating employers special tax incentives. It could also probably be necessary for the government to establish and maintain free data bank services to both potential employers and employees. Certainly this program would not cost any more than present government subsidizes, and it certainly is one clear way of bringing the poor into the mainstream of the U. S. economy.

Theoretically, this scheme would benefit all elements of the society, at least economically. It would first remove the poor person from the poverty rolls. This in turn would expand the tax base and perhaps reduce the welfare rolls. The potential employer would benefit by being able to have a labor force move to his place of business, rather than moving his business to where the people are located. The employer's community would benefit by an increased tax base and a larger consumer market.

Certainly, this general suggestion presents only the framework and leaves many details and problems unsolved, but this is at least one feasible scheme for reducing poverty in the U. S. Agreed, this is one among any number of programs which might have been suggested, but our society will continue to be faced with the problems of overcrowding, pollution, poverty, etc., until more widely based programs are developed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We have attempted to develop a theoretical rationale to explain the impact of the relative proportion of Blacks in an area on Black and White poverty rates. From data on 92 southern SMSA's we concluded that Blacks at the lower socio-economic levels were negatively effected, in an economic sense, as the proportion of Blacks in an area increased. Just the opposite relationship was found for the White population. It also was shown that there is a negative relationship between Black and White poverty when the size of the SMSA's were held constant. These findings may serve as indirect support for the theoretical orientation set forth in this paper.

Some general implications of this study were suggested also. We noted that those programs which are currently in operation or which have been tried previously may not be confronting the problems for which they are intended. The key to the problem may simply be to find enough jobs for everyone. Certainly this is no easy undertaking; however, until some new innovative programs are tried, we are bound to have a large portion of our population

which is frustrated, dissatisfied and unproductive. We propose that poverty is a structural rather than an individual problem. If we are going to make any significant headway toward understanding and reducing poverty, we must shift our attention from the individual to the basic structure of our society and economy.

FOOTNOTE

1. It should be noted that this particular theoretical orientation was greatly influenced and partially derived from Park's (1936) ideas on ecology, e.g., balance of nature, competition, dominance, and succession.

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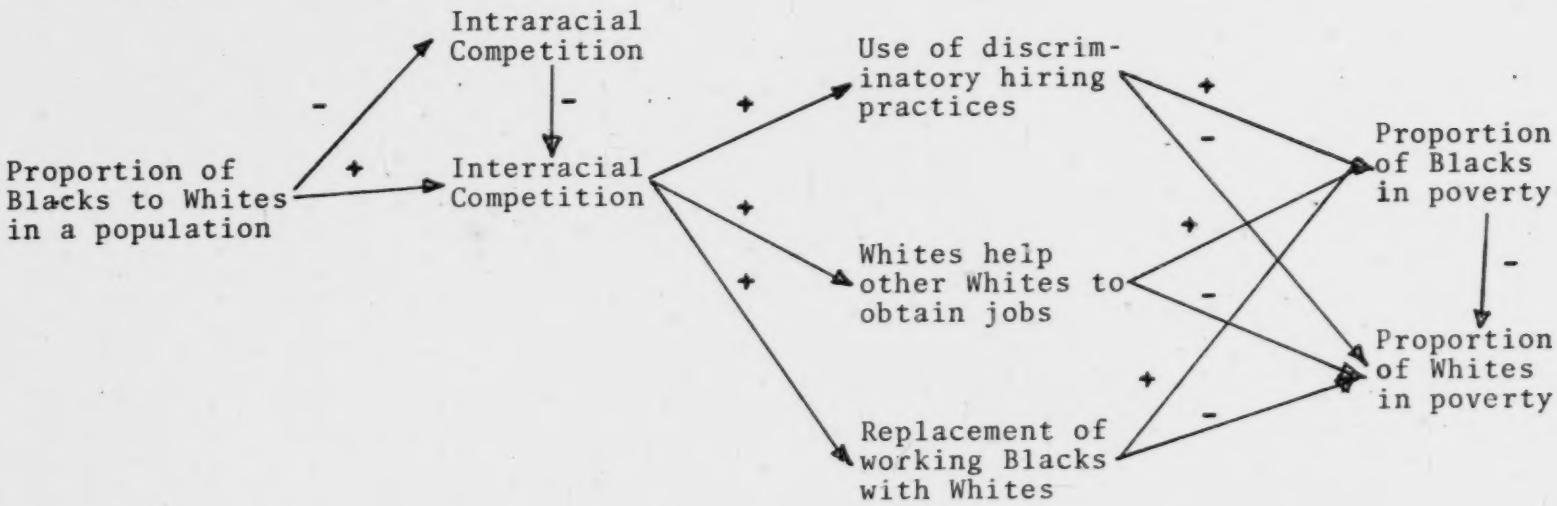
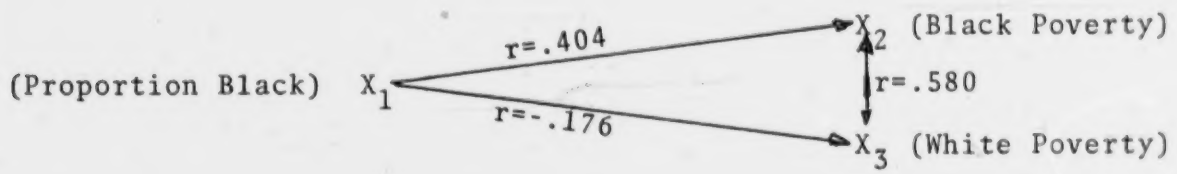
Figure 1. Schematic of Theoretical Expectations*



*The signs indicate the expected direction of the relationships

Figure 2. The Form of the Theoretical Linkage Between Proportion Black and Black and White Poverty. Southern SMSA's, 1970



Partial Coefficients

Population Size (X_4)	Number of Families in Poverty (X_5)
$r_{12.4}=+.634$	$r_{12.5}=+.614$
$r_{13.4}=-.361$	$r_{13.5}=-.649$
$r_{23.4}=-.247$	$r_{23.5}=-.943$

Table 1. Percent Black, Percent Black and White in Poverty, and Poverty Ratio of Blacks to Whites in Poverty. Southern SMSA, 1970.

Percent Black	Percent in Poverty		Poverty Ratio* Blacks to Whites	Number of SMSA's
	Black	White		
0-04.9	36.4	13.8	2.6	13
5-09.9	29.1	9.2	3.2	15
10-14.9	29.9	7.6	3.9	17
15-19.9	29.3	6.7	4.4	16
20-24.9	25.9	6.2	4.2	16
25-29.9	40.0	9.7	4.1	10
30 and over**	39.9	7.6	5.2	5

*The range of the percent Black in the 5 SMSA's with over 30 percent Black was 30.5 to 37.3

Table 2. Percent Black, Percent Black and White Poverty and Black and White Poverty Ratios for 92 SMSA's by States

Regions and States	Percent Black	Percent in Poverty		Black/White Poverty Ratio
		Black	White	
South	15.5	32.2	7.9	4.1
South Atlantic	16.1	29.9	6.8	4.4
Delaware	10.4	24.8	5.0	5.0
Maryland	20.3	22.4	4.9	4.6
District of Columbia	22.8	14.6	3.6	4.1
Virginia	20.9	26.7	6.8	3.9
West Virginia	3.4	26.9	11.1	2.4
North Carolina	18.1	30.2	7.3	4.1
South Carolina	20.1	39.2	9.5	4.1
Georgia	22.1	31.7	6.7	4.7
Florida	12.3	30.5	8.2	3.7
East South Central	19.4	35.6	8.6	4.1
Kentucky	9.7	26.1	8.1	3.8
Tennessee	19.5	35.8	8.4	4.3
Alabama	22.6	39.7	9.9	4.0
Mississippi	25.1	44.3	9.4	4.7
West South Central	14.1	33.7	9.2	3.7
Arkansas	13.9	44.4	12.1	3.7
Louisiana	25.8	40.2	8.5	4.7
Oklahoma	7.2	32.9	8.1	3.9
Texas	12.3	29.6	9.4	3.1